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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 OTTAWA 003564

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FOR SCA A/S RICHARD BOUCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2026

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: A/S BOUCHER'S DECEMBER 14-15 VISIT TO  
CANADA

Classified By: POLMINCOUNS Brian Flora. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Welcome to Ottawa. Your visit provides a great opportunity to reinforce the improved relationship we have developed with Canada since you were here earlier this year. It will be an excellent chance to take stock of what we are doing together in Afghanistan and elsewhere in South Asia, to emphasize the value we place in cooperating with Canada to manage our shared global interests, and to show the respect we hold for Canada's unique skills and capabilities. Prime Minister Harper's Conservative Party Government, in pressing for stronger controls over terrorist movements, in making the case for the spread of democracy and freedom as international priorities, and in showing a willingness to sacrifice when necessary, accepts its global responsibilities and is working to carry its share of the load. Your visit signals that we appreciate our relationship and take seriously our commitment to engage Canada as a partner.

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POLITICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT  
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12. (C) Prime Minister and Conservative Party Leader Stephen Harper won office in January 2006 after 12 years of Liberal Party government. Harper arrived in office determined to adjust Canada's policy settings in ways that reflected his own values-based but realistic vision of Canada and its place in the world. Shortly after the election, the PM instructed his key ministers to focus on his top defense, security, and foreign policy priorities:

-A- rebuilding and expanding the Canadian military's capability as a multi-role, combat-capable armed force; and,

-B- revitalizing and strengthening the Canada-U.S. foreign policy, defense, security and economic relationships.

-- REBUILDING AND EXPANDING THE MILITARY --

13. (C) Harper moved swiftly in 2006 to endorse and indefinitely extend the Canada-U.S. NORAD agreement, to instruct his defense minister to rapidly transform the Canadian Forces with a view toward interoperability with U.S. forces, and to increase defense spending by C\$15.4 billion in his first budget. The Conservatives funded an increase in troop strength from 62K to 75K and quickly updated and executed the Department of National Defense's (DND) long

dormant plan to procure strategic and tactical lift (four C-17s, seventeen C-130Js, sixteen TBD helicopters), three joint support ships, and 2,300 heavy vehicles for the army. The PM,s foreign policy and security and defense transformation goals were well-received by the U.S. DOD and by Canada,s neglected but experienced and capable personnel at the Canadian Forces (CF)and DND.

¶4. (C) The PM,s initiatives were similarly well received by domestic and international security professionals at the newly-formed DHS counterpart, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC). PSEPC viewed the moves as evidence that the new Government understood the need to evolve its security policy and practices in response to a changing threat environment, to reflect the nexus between defense and security, and to deepen Canada-U.S. planning and cooperation in these areas.

-- REVITALIZING, STRENGTHENING CANUS COOPERATION --

¶5. (C/NF) In addition to bolstering the broad Canada-U.S. bilateral relationship, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) was instructed to address Canadian security and trade opportunities worldwide by focusing on fewer high-impact areas where Canada could best advance its interests, preferably in concert with its closest allies. This was a marked change from the Liberal,s practice of diffusing Canada,s limited capacity around the world in an alphabet soup of diplomatic, foreign assistance, and military micro-deployments. Most of these deployments fed many Canadians, vision of themselves as peace-keepers and ardent multilateralists but produced few measurable results in the face of present-day transcendent threats to peace and security.

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¶6. (C/NF) The Canadian foreign policy bureaucracy has overall shown discipline in executing the PM,s policy vision, and most of our critical POCs are with it, but it is also clear to us that there are fewer Conservative policy adherents at DFAIT than there are at DND and PSEPC. Where there is a lack of direction from the Conservatives the foreign policy machinery tends to revert to its pre-Harper middle-power comfort zone of supporting multilateral agreements that tend to restrain our room for maneuver in the world. That said, since January we have been impressed by the willingness of officials at DFAIT to find areas of common cause with us.

-- AFGHANISTAN: POLITICAL CONCERNS, POLICY CONTINUITY --

¶7. (C/NF) PM Harper and his key advisers are deeply engaged in executing, reassessing, and evolving Canada,s Afghanistan policy for two main reasons:

-A- Canadian soldiers, lives on the battlefield, the security of Canadians at home and abroad, and the future of NATO are at stake in Afghanistan.

-B- Harper assesses that his government faces great political exposure should casualty-intolerant voters hold him responsible for troop deaths in Afghanistan.

¶8. (SBU) The new Liberal Party Leader Stephane Dion on December 5 moderated somewhat his previous call for Canada to immediately seek an honorable way out of Afghanistan. He called for a review of Canada,s role in NATO-ISAF, argued that Canada should push its allies to join in creating a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan, and suggested that Canada should be more effective in pressing its NATO partners to share the burden. Dion,s more nuanced discussion of Canada,s role in Afghanistan since his selection suggests that should he lead the Liberals back into government he would want to avoid being backed into a corner by his and his

party,s politically effective but unrealistic anti-war rhetoric. Indeed, while his strongly-stated preference would be for Canada to focus on development rather than war-fighting, his current formulation could afford him the latitude to maintain the CF,s role in the Kandahar region.

¶9. (C/NF) Weighing on the PM,s mind, however, is the consensus among Canadian political strategists that his government will fall over the budget in the spring, a time when hostilities and therefore troop losses will likely be on the rise in Afghanistan. This, combined with a recent apparent up-tick of support for the opposition Liberal Party, generates uncertainty over whether the Conservatives will be able to hold onto their current minority government, much less build a majority in the next election.

¶10. (C/NF) Harper and the Conservative Party,s political concerns limit their room for maneuver domestically and internationally if they hope to at least hold on to a minority government. Within limits, however, we expect that the Harper Government will continue to be as active a partner as political strategy will allow despite the widespread ambivalence about the Afghanistan mission, and the U.S., in key battleground provinces. At this point we do not expect the Conservative Government to change course in Afghanistan.

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AREAS FOR DISCUSSION  
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-- AFGHANISTAN --

¶11. (C) As noted, Afghanistan is Canada,s most critical  
Q11. (C) As noted, Afghanistan is Canada,s most critical foreign policy challenge at this time and it will likely dominate the meeting agenda. The officials with whom you speak would welcome:

-A- your take on the Riga Summit and how best to engage our NATO allies to get their fighting forces to burden-share in the south;

-B- your impression of France,s call for a contact group, of

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post-battle aid delivery mechanisms, the so-called &ink-blot8 approach, and of calls by some allies to negotiate with Taliban;

-C- your view of prospects for greater cooperation with Afghanistan,s neighbors, particularly Pakistan; and

-D- your thoughts on how to break through widespread media and opposition-inspired negativity in order to inform Canadians and our European allies about the considerable success we are having in Afghanistan.

-NATO Post-Riga-

¶12. (C) The PM and his cabinet have been stalwart in prosecuting what they view as Canada's historic duty in Afghanistan, where some 30 Canadian soldiers were killed over the past six months (44 since 2002) as the CF went about aggressively detecting, pursuing and eliminating Taliban forces. The Harper Government pressed hard for an Afghanistan success story at the NATO Summit in Riga but was disappointed. Chief of the Defense Staff General Rick Hillier quipped to us on December 5 that he had gone to Riga with low expectations but the Europeans managed to exceed them.

¶13. (C) The Conservatives were rightly concerned that their domestic political opponents would exploit the refusal by most NATO member states to drop harmful caveats limiting troop deployments to conflict areas such as the Kandahar

region in the south. Indeed, with Canada,s plea for help unmet at Riga the Conservatives have been and will continue to be hammered for their ineffective diplomacy by opinion leaders and by their political opponents.

-The Way Ahead-

¶14. (C) Despite the setbacks at Riga, the Canadians are keen to strategize with you on how to get key NATO partners to reverse course on caveats and to burden-share rather than burden-shift difficult, high-intensity tasks. They will also likely seek your views on the differences of opinion within NATO regarding aid delivery, the merits of the sink-blot8 strategic hamlet strategy, on the advisability of reaching out to moderate Taliban, and on what criteria would be used to identify such individuals and groups. Canada will not likely support the French proposal to create a contact group because Canada would not be included in the group, despite the resources the Canadians have allotted to the war and the loss of Canadian soldiers fighting there.

¶15. (SBU) The Canadians will be interested in U.S. thinking on how to more rapidly build capacity among the Afghan military and police. You should also expect to exchange views on the prospects for cooperation with Pakistan in combating the flow of combatants and materiel to Afghanistan, particularly the Kandahar region.

-Strategic Communications at Home-

¶16. (C/NF) In 2002 the then Liberal Government presented the Afghanistan mission as a peace-keeping and development operation rather than the combat mission into which it has evolved. Further, the Conservative Government did not emphasize the risks associated with the mission last spring when it put extension through 2009 to a vote. The Afghanistan mission has received mixed support from Canadians, many of whom question why their soldiers continue to die in and around Kandahar when there are relatively few Afghan soldiers in the fight, and when so few in NATO are willing to share the burden in the fractious south. Qwilling to share the burden in the fractious south.

¶17. (C) The political opposition and most mainstream media perpetuate and exploit the notion held by many Canadians that it would be possible for the alliance to modify its engagement to development only despite the transcendent threat the Taliban poses to the Afghan people, to those engaged in development there, and to our armed forces. Further, the government,s message that the Canadian Forces must take-on the Taliban to create the conditions for development8 is not breaking through.

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¶18. (SBU) As of November 11, just over 50 percent of Canadians either approved (31-plus pct) or strongly approved (19 pct) of Canadian military participation in Afghanistan. This represented a softening of support from the 75 percent approval rate when Canada first sent forces to Afghanistan in ¶2002. The figures were particularly weak in Quebec, with only 35 percent of the population supporting the mission and 45 percent strongly disapproving of it.

-- COUNTERING IDEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM --

¶19. (C/REL CAN) Canadian officials are concerned about the extremism that emanates from Pakistan and leads to cross border attacks in Afghanistan. This concern intensified over the past year by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, with a clear connection to the Madrassas in Pakistan. Canadian officials were intrigued by CT Ambassador Crumpton,s recent call for Canada, the U.S. and our partners to develop a "common narrative" against extremism so as to synchronize our efforts to counter extremist rhetoric and to contain its adherents abroad and at home.

-- INTERNATIONAL PEACE OPERATIONS --

¶20. (SBU) To better support international peace operations missions, Canada created the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START). Like its U.S. equivalent, S/CRS, START has experienced growing pains. The Canadians are keen to exercise and cooperate with S/CRS with a view towards sharing both governments, hard won regional expertise and networks in South Asia and elsewhere. As two of only a handful of countries that have assumed the mission in a serious way there also is room for the U.S. and Canada to cooperate closely on the development of post-conflict stabilization architectures in NATO, the G-8, and at the UN.

-- NON-PROLIFERATION, INDIA --

¶21. (C/NF) The Conservative Government sees the U.S. as a partner on the broader non-proliferation agenda, including in South Asia. During a recent in-house discussion of non-proliferation the PM suggested to his senior security advisors that Canada should consider moving away from its traditional normative approach to non-proliferation through treaties and agreements, and put more emphasis on the emerging operational approaches such as the Proliferation Security Initiative.

¶22. (C/NF) DFAIT,s career non-proliferation experts (some of whom are stridently opposed to the U.S. approach) pushed back, arguing that there is a need for both, and that it would be wise for Canada to retain as many tools in its tool box as possible. Harper is still listening to them, but has made it clear that he will not be bound by long-standing Canadian non-proliferation theology. Indeed, he is an enthusiastic supporter for practical, PSI-style approaches. How this tension is resolved could affect Canada,s willingness to support the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement and other key U.S. initiatives in the non-proliferation world.

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